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Monica Duffy Toft: The Geography of Ethnic Violence

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The Forgotten Meaning of Territory

So that my generation would comprehend the
Homeland's worth,
Men were always transformed to dust, it seems.
The Homeland is the remains of our forefathers
Who turned into dust for this precious soil.
—*Cholpan Ergash, Uzbek poet*

No matter how barren, no territory is worthless if it is a homeland. History is replete with conflicts in which people fight to the death over what appears to be territory of questionable value. This is because territory is simultaneously a divisible, quantifiable object and an indivisible and romantic subject.

As a physical object, territory can be divided and later redivided. It can be explored, inhabited, mined, polluted, exchanged, sold, bought, and farmed. Borders and boundaries can be redrawn, place-names changed, and people moved from here to there.

Yet in many places of the world, borders and boundaries seem fixed in time and in the imagination. The name of the land has remained the same for generations, and the people inhabiting that land would rather die than lose the hope or right of return. In this context territory takes on a meaning that far exceeds its material and objective description. It becomes not an object to be exchanged but an indivisible component of a group's identity.

Territories are objects that are physically divisible; at the same time they become intractably and eternally indivisible. How else can we explain why, in places like Jerusalem and Kosovo, men and women not only are willing to die but also allow their sons and daughters to die just to remain in their homeland?

The central theme of this book is that different actors—states and ethnic groups—view the same territory in different ways. This is not because states are generally rational and ethnic groups are generally irrational. Rather, it is because territory means different things to states and ethnic groups. Chapter 2 introduces and explores a theory of ethnic violence that places the dual meaning of territory at the center of a general expla-

nation of why some ethnic conflicts become violent and others do not. I call it the theory of indivisible territory. Territory is a *sine qua non* of the state and can be an irreducible component of ethnic group identity. For both, control over territory may become a matter of survival and, consequently, an indivisible issue. When both sides in a conflict regard control over a disputed territory as indivisible, violence is likely.

In fact, if we ask ourselves why presumably rational actors—in this case, political elites representing states and ethnic groups at a hypothetical bargaining table—ever resort to violence, we are left with a puzzle. The puzzle stems from the often observed fact that there are almost always solutions short of violence which benefit both or all sides of a conflict more than could violence. Violence is costly, and it is risky, so whyever try it? The answer lies in the “almost always” qualification. Social scientists have in fact isolated three key obstacles to a rational settlement of disputes short of violence: (1) private information; (2) a commitment problem; and (3) an indivisible issue.¹ The private-information obstacle focuses our attention on the fact that parties to a dispute often have a large incentive to conceal their true aims and goals, as well as the costs and risks they are willing to sustain to reach those goals. In such cases, over- or underestimations can lead to suboptimal outcomes (namely, war). The commitment problem addresses the issue of trust over the long term: if I agree now, and I am the weaker party, how can you, as the stronger party, credibly commit to honoring whatever agreement we reach short of war? Finally, the indivisible-issue obstacle comes up in conflicts over values that either literally cannot be divided (one thinks here of the apocryphal tale of Solomon’s decision to divide a baby in half to satisfy two women who claim to be the mother) or that for one reason or another, the two parties consider indivisible.² Territory, or more specifically, *homeland* territory, often has this characteristic.

Understanding ethnic war therefore requires an understanding of how two actors come to view control over the same piece of ground as an indivisible issue.³ For ethnic groups, the key factor is settlement patterns—that is, where groups live and whether they are concentrated in a homeland and a majority or a minority. Settlement patterns bind the capability and legitimacy of an ethnic group’s mobilization for sovereignty. Where both capability and legitimacy are high, as they are for groups concentrated in a region of a state, ethnic groups are likely to consider control over disputed territory an indivisible issue and demand sovereignty. However, states are likely to view control over a territory—even a worthless or costly territory—as an indivisible issue whenever precedent-setting effects come into play. Precedent setting operates when a state faces more than one potential secessionist. The state fears establishing the reputation that it allows the division of its territory. Only when both an

ethnic group and a state, usually for different reasons, view the issue of territorial control as indivisible will violence erupt. If, however, the ethnic group does not demand sovereignty (that is, make an indivisible claim to the territory) or the state sees its territory as divisible, ethnic war is less likely.

A key contribution of this book is to detail the important differences between political actors in ethnic conflicts and how these differences play themselves out in disputes over territory. Ethnic groups (and nations) are not states. Although reducing ethnic groups to the ontological equivalent of states may make for elegant and parsimonious theories, my research makes it clear that such theories can be of only limited use.⁴

Finally, the central subject of this research is *violent* ethnic conflict. At its root, ethnic conflict is about groups of people arguing with other groups, where the “other” is usually characterized by differences in race, language, or religion. The vast majority of ethnic conflicts do not involve violence.⁵ Here, however, my focus is on the subject of violent ethnic conflict—both its presence and its absence. The book’s central question is, Why do some ethnic conflicts turn violent, but not others? I do not attempt to explain why ethnic conflicts arise in the first place, only the conditions under which they are more or less likely to escalate to violence.

The Importance of the Issue

Today nearly two-thirds of all armed conflicts include an ethnic component. Ethnic conflicts are almost twice as likely to break out as fights over governmental control and four times more likely than interstate wars.⁶ Ethnic conflicts are the most prevalent form of armed conflict and are unlikely to abate in the short or long term. The number and intensity of ethnic conflicts across the globe directly and indirectly threaten the lives of millions. Since World War II alone, millions of people—both those capable of bearing arms and those incapable of doing so—have died as a result of their membership in a specific ethnic group. Understanding the conditions under which ethnic conflicts escalate to violence—especially extreme forms such as genocide—may help political elites and policy makers prevent such fatal outcomes more effectively, or at least reduce their destructiveness when they do happen. The structural explanation I offer holds out the possibility of facilitating this worthy goal.

Beyond highlighting policy options that can work, this book sheds a cautionary light on a number of policy proposals that either are unlikely to work or may prove counterproductive. Marc Trachtenberg proposes one potential policy measure, which my research suggests is problematic.

If the problem in what used to be Yugoslavia is that different ethnic groups there can no longer live together peacefully, and if for reasons having to do with precedent, proximity, and spillover effects in general, the Western world decides that the continuation of such violence is intolerable, then there is no compelling reason that intervention should be limited to preventing starvation or controlling atrocities . . . there is no reason why the outside powers should rule out as illegitimate the very idea of trying to get at the root of the problem—for example, by arranging for an orderly, equitable, and humane exchange of populations.⁷

Trachtenberg's recommendation of population exchanges seems an intuitively sound policy, yet the current empirical research does not make it clear that the exchange and separation of ethnic groups will "get at the root of the problem" and quell ethnic violence.⁸ My research shows why.

Ethnically based violence may also expand from conflicts within state boundaries to those involving other states.⁹ In the most famous example, World War I, an essentially ethnic conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary eventually engulfed all the great powers, resulting in a shattering destruction and loss of life. Similar fears appear today in the cautious approach that European governments are taking to the caustic Balkan environment. Ethnic wars have created refugee flows, disrupted trade, and closed transportation routes, all of which have the potential to destabilize the international system.¹⁰

The theory of indivisible territory presented in chapter 2 directly addresses these issues by detailing how ethnic conflicts escalate into violence. It demonstrates that without an understanding of what territory means to each actor in a potential negotiation, averting potential conflicts is all but impossible. The theory, which addresses the origins of ethnic violence, also bears on the resolution of such violence. Concerns over control of territory does not wither as a result of armed combat.¹¹ Instead, the fact of combat usually only reinforces the argument that because more brethren have died defending the land, it is even more incumbent on a new generation of fighters to regain or maintain control over that land.

The Literature

A review of the recent literature on ethnic violence illuminates the ways in which my theory is different from past approaches. Territory as a factor—its meaning and implications—is largely missing from previous considerations. A number of approaches have been proposed to explain ethnic violence, but each provides only a partial explanation for why ethnic

violence erupts.¹² These approaches can be divided into three rough categories: material, nonmaterial, and elite.

Thesis: Material-Based Approaches

A number of scholars have approached the subject of ethnic violence by focusing on the material conditions of ethnic groups within a state. This approach has three major strands: development and modernization, relative deprivation, and intrinsic worth.

Political-development and economic-modernization arguments focus on the relative development of regionally concentrated ethnic groups within a state's borders.¹³ As the economy and state structures modernize, individuals should transfer their loyalties from their ethnic group to the state, leading to a demise in ethnic identity.¹⁴ This in turn should cause ethnic conflict and violence to diminish. In this theory, any ethnic conflict and violence that remain are the product of uneven development and modernization.¹⁵ Equalize economic development, and ethnic conflict disappears.¹⁶

The development and modernization approach has not fared well empirically. First, development and modernization have not led to a decline in the salience of ethnic identities or regionally based ethnic conflict and violence. Violence continues to plague Spain and Northern Ireland, for example. Second, violence plagues rich and poor regions alike. In the former Yugoslavia, secessionist demands and violence broke out in the richest regions first, not in the poorest. Only after the federation was fully compromised did violence break out in the backward region of Kosovo. Economic development alone cannot explain the emergence of ethnic conflict and violence.¹⁷

The group of scholars arguing for relative deprivation focus on resource competition among individuals who identify with a group. They claim that violence stems principally from perceptions of a decline in economic or political conditions after a period of improvement.¹⁸ The resulting competition for resources sparks collective action among individuals, who invariably form groups. As one group mobilizes, other groups are spurred into action. As these groups compete, conflict and violence erupt.¹⁹

Although the idea of relative deprivation seems intuitively correct, it is impossible to test this theory adequately. Within any given society, individuals and groups have different notions of what constitutes a relative decline or improvement in their standard of living.²⁰ The theory provides no guidelines on how to measure the perceptions of individuals in a society and how to aggregate those perceptions across groups.

A third major type of material-based argument comes from the international relations literature and focuses on a territory's intrinsic worth, a value that does not vary among actors.²¹ In this theory, actors are more willing to use force to secure valuable territory.²² This argument has two variations: strategic worth and intrinsic value. Often the two are inextricable.²³ Strategic worth describes the security value of a given piece of territory. Is the territory astride major routes of communication? Does it share an interstate border? Does it contain natural barriers to invasion from other states or from states considered historical enemies? Intrinsic-value arguments focus on the wealth or resources that inhere in a territory. Does the territory contain a concentration of mineral or natural resources? Does it possess an infrastructure or industry of value? Does it have space for population expansion or arable land that could support an expanded population? If the loss of the contested territory threatens to undermine the security or economic survival of an actor, then that actor is likely to resort to force. This argument contains a powerful logic, and, as we will see, this logic does explain some variation in outcomes.²⁴

Although material conditions do affect relations between states and ethnic groups, explanations based only on material conditions underplay the ethnic dimensions and consequent tensions that might also contribute to conflict. State policies, for example, are not only economic or strategic, nor do they have only economic or material ramifications. Consider the Aral Sea basin. The Soviet state controlled the development and distribution of economic resources throughout the Soviet Union. It adopted policies and industries that undermined both the economic well-being of ethnic groups living in the Aral Sea basin and the cultural heritage of some groups. The huge hydroelectric dams and energy projects that benefited the rest of the Soviet Union caused the Aral Sea to dry up. Areas once teeming with fish are gone, and salt from the sea has caused severe damage to herding areas. The professions of fishing and herding are not only vital to the economic well-being of the indigenous populations of the region but also constitute part of their cultural heritage and national identity. In this case, economic development, or mis-development, by the state has caused these groups to suffer in both economic (material) and cultural (nonmaterial) terms.

Material-based explanations tend to overlook the frequent conjunction between material and nonmaterial factors. They thus oversimplify the motives of the actors. They cannot provide an explanation for why some groups are willing to risk death, internment, or mass deportation for seemingly worthless territory, or why those groups sometimes seek independence even when economic conditions are certain to be more desperate than those they are fighting to leave behind.

Rather than exclusively seek to ensure their material well-being, ethnic groups may rationally choose violence as a means of securing a cultural

and historical livelihood that may link them to a particular place.²⁵ Control over economic development can provide for material needs as well as secure a part of the group's identity. In other words, even if we could redistribute wealth from richer to poorer regions or alleviate economic disparities between groups, such material redistribution would not necessarily eliminate the underlying fears and resentments between them. Finally, these approaches provide no necessary or logical reason why, among all the potential values over which two actors might struggle, material values matter most. The priority of material values is simply assumed. This assumption, as we will see, leads to significant weaknesses in the ability of material-based approaches to offer a general explanation of violent ethnic conflict.

Antithesis: Nonmaterial-Based Approaches

Another group of scholars has written about particular ethnic conflicts and the personalities and events that caused them to escalate. This literature crosses several disciplines, including anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology. These scholars typically focus on such factors as the identity, history, and cultural heritage of groups to explain ethnic violence. The two most common variants are ancient hatreds and security-dilemma explanations.

ANCIENT HATREDS

Ancient-hatreds arguments explain violent conflict as stemming from long-standing historical enmities among ethnic groups. They tend to place great weight on the linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious ties of individuals within a group. These ties are passed down from generation to generation. Individuals so socialized are considered as being inside the group—they, together with “me,” constitute “we.” Those outside this socialized group are “they.”²⁶ Because individual identity is so directly tied to that of the group, when the group is threatened, individuals, as members of that group, also feel threatened.²⁷ Ethnic violence emerges when each group attempts to maintain its boundaries against what it perceives as the depredations of historical enemies.

The ancient-hatreds argument suffers on three counts. First, many ethnic conflicts are not ancient. They may be modern phenomena that can be traced back for only decades as opposed to centuries. The notion of a Bosniak, for example, which differentiated a Bosnian Muslim from a Bosnian Croat or Bosnian Serb, emerged only in the late 1960s. Second, this argument cannot explain why a group that fights wars also cooperates with the group it is fighting against some of the time. Ethnic groups

cooperate with one another most of the time.²⁸ Third, this explanation cannot account for why some cases escalate to violence and others do not.

SECURITY DILEMMA

The second nonmaterialist explanation places ethnic violence in the context of a security dilemma.²⁹ The central driving force is fear.³⁰ When the authority of a multinational state declines, the central regime can no longer protect the interests of ethnic groups, creating a vacuum in which ethnic groups compete to establish and control a new regime that will protect their interests. When considering the future composition of a new regime dominated by opposing groups and the probable treatment of their own group within such a new regime, ethnic groups fear widespread discrimination and even death. Imagining a worst-case scenario, each group attributes offensive capabilities and hostile intentions to competing groups.³¹ The likely result is violence.

Although the security-dilemma explanation is logically quite powerful, we can find many cases in which fear was not the motivating factor for ethnic violence. The logic of the security dilemma was originally invoked to explain how actors not interested in aggression might nevertheless end up fighting a war. It does not address other motivations such as greed or aggressiveness.³² In his efforts to mobilize Serbs to attack Bosnia in 1992, Slobodan Milosevic, for example, was probably more motivated by greed or personal ambition than by fear. The collapse of central authority may make some actors fearful, but greed or outright aggressiveness cannot be dismissed as possible motivations for others.

The main difference between nonmaterialist approaches and material-based arguments is that nonmaterialists recognize that individuals, as part of groups, can be mobilized in order to protect elements of their identity. But in many such explanations, the mechanism of violence reduces to the claim that ethnic groups fight because they “naturally” want independence to ensure the protection of their identity and well-being.

Further, nonmaterial-based approaches tend to overemphasize the local or bottom-up aspects of conflicts of interest while downplaying or even ignoring the concerns of a state as an actor in the international system.

Protosynthesis: Elite Manipulation

A third approach emphasizes the role of political leaders in exhorting the masses to violence. Elite-manipulation approaches straddle material and nonmaterial explanations; some scholars focus on the material incentives

that leaders use to rally support, and others turn to nonmaterial incentives, such as a leader's charisma and ability to evoke history and national identity.

Elite-manipulation approaches assume that passive masses can be stirred to violence by the oratorical skills of charismatic leaders.³³ Thus nationalism is a tool used to maintain power. The most common recent version of this approach is the delegitimized Communist leaders attempting to hold onto office. Many of these leaders hit upon the convenient idea that they had been ardent nationalists all along. Their privileged access to the state media enabled them to reconstruct national identities, placing themselves at the vanguard of a new national mobilization.³⁴ Given that many formerly Communist states were multinational, nationalist rhetoric by leaders seeking legitimacy often directed national passions against members of other groups, leading to increased violence. Milosevic, for example, invoked both the history of the Serbian nation as a victim of atrocities dating back for centuries and the threat by the secessionist republics of Croatia and Slovenia to the economic well-being of Yugoslavia. According to Milosevic, Serbs needed to rally to avoid falling victim again to the Croats and to save the Yugoslav economic system from collapse.³⁵ This explanatory approach has a strong *prima facie* appeal. Nationalist leaders certainly appear to have been responsible for much violence in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, elite-manipulation theories present at least four problems. First, they misconstrue and underestimate the power of nationalism. They afford nationalism little independent effect. Elites are assumed not to believe in the nationalist cause, and the masses are assumed to be passive victims of the elites' charged rhetoric. The theories provide no evidence that the distribution of demagogues is greater in areas that turn to violence and fail to explain violence in cases in which either the elites or the masses are genuine nationalists. Second, even when elites manipulate symbols, myths, and histories for personal gain, their constructions become embedded in history, perception, and interpretation. Elites are then beholden to this constructed reality if they want to stay in power.³⁶ Third, elite-manipulation explanations overpredict violence. If leaders can arouse a passive nation to violence, why should they not be able to dissuade an aroused nation from taking up arms? This explanation does not address such cases either logically or empirically. Finally, some elites succeed, and others fail. A recent failure is Slovak prime minister Vladimir Meciar's attempt to inflame an ethnic conflict over borders and minorities. Meciar recommended a population transfer of ethnic Slovak and ethnic Hungarian minorities living in neighboring countries. He was excoriated domestically and internationally.³⁷ Such cases highlight a chief weakness of elite-manipulation approaches: they cannot be generalized.

Although the literature can be divided into material and nonmaterial-

based approaches, none of the scholars mentioned earlier argues that his or her chosen explanation exhausts the useful range of approaches. Each approach explains some occurrences of violence. None by itself, however, constitutes an adequate basis for a general explanation. Material-based approaches suffer when explaining why some ethnic groups and states risk their survival in pursuit of materially worthless land.³⁸ Non-material-based approaches feature violence as the inevitable consequence of human nature (in this case, the desire to exist in a bounded ethnic community). None explains why some conflicts are much more intense than others or why some groups appear to coexist more easily with others.

Territory As an Indivisible Subject and a Divisible Object

An emphasis on territory and how it informs the motives of actors helps us to better understand the emergence of violence in three ways. First, by examining territory in relation to settlement patterns and homelands we learn how ethnic groups go about legitimating their claims and mobilizing their populations. Second, recognizing the different meanings of territory allows us to better understand the differing behaviors of states. Finally, because violence is an interactive process, seeing how different types of actors view disputed territory helps us to understand how they end up in violence together.

As we will see more fully in the remaining chapters, territory is both a material resource—an object that can be divided and exchanged—and a nonmaterial value—a subject that can be neither divided nor exchanged. The next chapter isolates the conditions under which this logic operates more or less intensely.

Research Methods and Procedures

In this book I examine principally the type of violence that pits ethnic groups against states.³⁹ This type of violence is more common than other types, for example, group-to-group violence within a state.⁴⁰ I have focused on this single category in order to achieve depth and detail. Yet the explanatory scope of the theory introduced here is wide enough to explain other categories of violence. As will become clear in chapter 2, if the state is dominated by one ethnic group with concerns about the integrity of the state *and* the defense of an ethnic historic homeland, then, according to my theory, the state will behave like an ethnic group. This pattern is exemplified by the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Similarly, two

states, each dominated by an ethnic group, might engage in an interstate war for worthless land because the ethnic groups see the disputed land as part of their respective and mutually exclusive homelands. This pattern is exemplified by the conflict between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus. Such interstate wars resemble ethnic wars more than they do wars of conquest.⁴¹

The main hypotheses of the theory of indivisible territory and ethnic war involve the settlement patterns of ethnic groups and fears of precedent setting by states. If an ethnic group is a majority, concentrated in a region of a state, and is located in its homeland, then it is most likely to see control over a particular territory as indivisible, demand independence, and therefore end up in violence. If a state contains two or more ethnic groups capable of seceding, then it is likely to see its territory as indivisible and resort to violence to maintain its borders. To test these and other hypotheses, I employ two methods. Statistical analysis tests the relationship between key variables (for example, settlement patterns and resources) and the likelihood of violent ethnic conflict, and case study analysis investigates and scrutinizes the logic of this explanation in comparison with alternative explanations.⁴² Each method compensates for some of the weaknesses of the other. Although the statistics are not well suited to capturing the element of strategic interaction, they nevertheless help to establish the validity of the more general claim that certain aspects of territory explain ethnic violence. The case studies, however, suffer from being only four of hundreds of potential cases of ethnic-state violence. They may include a bias that I failed to notice in selecting them to test the theory. Yet, where the statistical analysis does not allow us to gain a sense of the interactive element among the combatants, case studies help us enter the minds of the decision makers.

Statistical Analysis

To determine the relationship between territory and violent ethnic conflict, I employ the Minorities at Risk (MAR) data set.⁴³ Because ethnic conflict is assumed for the inclusion of cases and the data set includes the presence and absence of violent political activity, MAR is an excellent data set for testing my theory. In this project Gurr and his colleagues categorized 275 politically active communal groups from World War II through the 1990s. They included groups that had (1) experienced systematic economic or political discrimination vis-à-vis other groups in a state and/or (2) undertaken some sort of political action (violent or non-violent) to secure their collective interests. Information for each group

includes the level of concentration of minorities, as well as different levels of political action, ranging from no action to full-scale rebellion.

Because this theory is ultimately a model of conflict bargaining, and the decisive variable that produces violence is a lack of issue divisibility among the actors (that is, strategic interaction in bargaining), a direct statistical testing of all the mechanisms of the argument is not possible. Instead, the statistical analyses are used as plausibility probes regarding the more general question of whether the likelihood of ethnic violence varies with (1) different settlement patterns and (2) concerns about precedent setting. In other words, the statistical tests address whether settlement patterns and precedent setting matter, rather than how they matter. The statistics show, for example, that the concentration of an ethnic group in a region is practically a necessary condition for violence and that the dispersion and urbanization of ethnic groups are sufficient conditions for nonrebellion. They do not, and cannot, show that this violence emerged because of actors' specific concerns, such as majority rule or fears of establishing a reputation for allowing a division of its territory.

Case Studies

The particular mechanisms of the theory are tested more systematically by way of process tracing.⁴⁴ I examine four case studies, in which two states interact with two component ethnic groups actively seeking greater autonomy and control over their homelands, formerly part of the Soviet Union. These cases consist of Russia in relation to the Chechens and Tatars and Georgia in relation to the Abkhaz and Ajars, roughly from 1990 to 1994.

These cases serve as a good laboratory because they offer variation on both the independent and the dependent variables (for example, settlement patterns and violence due to ethnic conflict). They also control as much as we can hope for in the social sciences for such variables as history (both states had similar forms of government—one-party, communist systems), culture and religion (all four groups more or less adhered to Islam), administrative status (each had equal administrative status in the Soviet Union as an autonomous republic), and the interstate system (their emergence as independent states at approximately the same time produced similar structural constraints and opportunities).

Such case control comes with methodological costs. Perhaps the most glaring cost is the active nationalities policies of the Soviet system, which deeply influenced the geographic disposition of ethnic majorities and minorities in this region. Therefore I distinguish those aspects of ethnic group behavior that might be unique to the region from those that are not.

Yet, for all the problems, there are also benefits, notably the vast amount of readily available census data and number of maps. The Soviet Union was very good at keeping track of its populations. One of the most comprehensive resources available on the visual distribution of populations is the 1964 *Atlas Narodov Mira* (Atlas of the nations of the world).⁴⁵ A multitude of other maps are available from authoritative sources such as the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These two sorts of data provide an accurate picture of the landscape: the census data provide the raw numbers and percentages of group members and the maps graphically depict where people reside.

In conjunction with these census and cartographic data, many primary and secondary accounts describe the play of events in this period. I consulted primary sources such as newspapers, along with the speeches and interviews of politicians involved in the decisions over whether to negotiate or to fight. The nature of nationalist discourse and statesmanship requires an examination of speeches and interviews in light of the audiences to whom their message is directed. Mintimer Shamiyev, the leader of Tatarstan, for example, was more nationalistic when speaking before Tatar nationalists than in interviews that he knew would receive a broader audience. As I researched the case studies, I kept the possibility of such strategic behavior in mind when analyzing the discourse, interpreting what it meant depending on the context. Relatedly, in some cases decision makers might represent a territory as indivisible in order to create the most advantageous bargaining position. We would like evidence, such as diary entries or memorandums from private meetings, to suggest that the decision maker truly believed the territory was indivisible. When such evidence is not available, as is often the case, one needs to scrutinize the behavior of elites and populations. We would expect pragmatic, uncommitted, and self-serving elites to be less consistent in bargaining and less likely to risk violence. Elites who are true believers or committed nationalists are likely to be both more consistent and more willing to risk violence. If elites and their populations willingly put themselves in harm's way to achieve independence, this is a good indication that they truly see the territory as indivisible.

I weigh evidence testing the theory of indivisible territory in light of competing explanations. So, for example, in each case, I consider whether elite-driven or material considerations better account for the emergence of violence or peace.

Plan of the Book

Using the idea of the indivisibility of territory as a foundation for explaining ethnic violence, in the following chapter I set forth the theoretical

framework. I begin with an examination of the two types of actors in theory: states and ethnic groups. I argue that ethnic violence is a function of how these actors view territory, which is intricately connected with each type of actor's conception of survival. I lay out two conditions for ethnic violence: if the state regards its territory as indivisible and an ethnic group demands independence, then violence is likely. If either of these conditions is absent, then a negotiated settlement might be achieved.

Statistical tests of the propositions of the theory are laid out in chapter 3. Although due to limitations in available data not all of the variables in the model can be tested, the basic argument about the centrality of territory in explaining ethnic violence receives strong support. The tests show that settlement patterns must be part of any general explanation of ethnic violence. Furthermore, the presence of resources is not a good indicator of violence, whereas the ethnic profile of a state (for example, uninational, binational, or multinational) is.

Further support for the argument is developed in chapters 4 through 7, which detail the case studies in depth. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, examine Moscow's relations with the Tatars and Chechens from the late 1980s until 1994. The Moscow-Tatar interaction ended in a negotiated settlement, whereas the Moscow-Chechen one turned into a civil war. In the Moscow-Tatar interaction, we find the Tatars representing their interests in divisible terms. Although the Tatars would have liked to control their homeland, their weak demographic presence in the region precluded them from representing Tatarstan as the domain of Tatars only. Economics were at the heart of this conflict, not identity. In the Chechen-Moscow interaction, both sides represented their interests as indivisible. The Chechens, concentrated in their homeland, viewed Moscow as an illegitimate imperial power bent on destroying Chechnya and Chechen identity. In the Chechen view, the conflict that emerged after 1989 was not new but the continuation of a three-hundred-year old struggle that began with their ancestors and would continue with their own deaths, if it came to that. Because both sides viewed control over the territory in indivisible terms, there was no room for compromise. The result was war.

Chapters 6 and 7 move us to Georgia for an examination of Tbilisi's interactions with the Abkhaz and Ajars. As in the previous set of cases, civil war emerged in one (Abkhazia), a negotiated settlement in the other (Ajaria). In Abkhazia we find a minority that sees itself under siege. Most Abkhaz live in Abkhazia, yet they constitute only a small minority (18 percent) of the population. Fear of a loss of identity in a Georgian-dominated state induced the Abkhaz to seek greater autonomy. At first Abkhazia's terms made the territory divisible, as the group sought a loose confederal arrangement. However, once Georgia dispatched troops and Russia came to Abkhazia's aid, Abkhazia's demands shifted. In its view, the territory became indivisible. The state of Georgia represented its in-

terests in indivisible terms all along. This explains why violence marked this interaction. The Ajars represented a completely different situation, in which regional actors spent much of their time convincing the state that they were not a threat, that they saw themselves as part of the broader Georgian nation. The state, however, under siege from multiple secessionist movements, the machinations of power politics by Russia, and its own version of virulent nationalism, had difficulty seeing the Ajars as friends. Although Georgia represented its interests as indivisible, it ultimately recognized that the Ajars were not a threat, and violence was averted.

Taken together, these two pairs of case studies provide for a good deal of variation. In two cases we find civil war breaking out, and in two other cases negotiated settlements were achieved. And the variation in outcomes occurs within each of the two states: both Russia and Georgia either negotiated or fought in one of the two cases.⁴⁶ Along with the variation, these cases also offer a fair degree of control. As mentioned earlier, all four ethnic groups adhered to Islam more or less. All experienced the breakup of the Soviet Union at the same time, and all faced similar international constraints and opportunities.

Chapter 8 begins by summarizing the basic argument and introducing both a competing argument—that institutions such as socialist-style federalism can better explain actor capability and legitimacy endowments—and how my theory fares against this argument in explaining the nature of the disintegrations of Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It then discusses the limitations of the analysis and concludes with a discussion of its key theoretical and policy implications. Three main theoretical implications and three policy implications follow from this analysis. I argue that, theoretically, it is wrong to assume that ethnic groups are irrational actors, even if they seem to be fighting for worthless territory or a dire economic situation following independence, that some interstate wars resemble ethnic wars more than is commonly recognized, and that elites alone are not responsible for the worst manifestations of nationalism. On the policy side, I argue that for a peaceful resolution to a dispute, both stability and justice must be pursued, that we need to consider how the origins of conflicts affect whether and how they are resolved, and that resettlement and partition must take into account the notion of homeland for true peace to be achieved.

Conclusion

I have a number of goals in this book. The first is to emphasize the vital role that territory continues to play in domestic and interstate affairs. Scholars in international relations sometimes suggest that with globaliza-

tion and transnationalism, the value of territory is diminishing. Yet, if this were the case, ethnic groups would not be so desperate to control their homelands. Nor would states and the international community hesitate to allow them to do so. In current accounts of ethnic violence, this close connection between identity and the occupation and control of a self-imagined territory has largely been forgotten, both in social science theorizing and in policy making. Forgetting territory keeps us from understanding the dynamics of groups that are, in essence, competing for control over territory.

Second, I want to show that although elites play an important role in inciting ethnic conflicts, audience participation matters as well. This is not a new insight, but it has been largely overlooked by analysts who place the burden of ethnic conflict almost exclusively on the shoulders of elites. The masses are not blind followers.⁴⁷

Third and finally, this focus on territory and indivisibility should provide further evidence that discourse is a vital component in interactions. Even if discourses are not “real,” they have real, material consequences. Tales about historic homelands and about the generations of ethnic brethren who gave their lives to defend those homelands may seem half-baked and artificially constructed, but they often resonate with those who tell them and those who listen to them. They consequently affect the cohesion, unity, and mobilization of ethnic groups. These recounted and recast tales also provide information about where a particular group places its ethnogenesis, which in turn reveals the territory its members would like to control. Regardless of their objective validity, these historical discourses have a real impact on the relations between and among ethnic groups and states.